

My beloved students of YPO,

You now have heard of the terribly sad news that my life at NEC has been terminated. You are probably upset and confused, so I must begin by telling you what happened. This is a most serious matter, so I ask for your careful attention, as I always have in our rehearsals.

Many years ago I met a dedicated videographer named Peter Benjamin. Several years later Benjamin was involved in a serious incident of a sexual nature and he served time in jail. I was not aware of any of the details surrounding the charges.

After his incarceration was over, I got to know him better and was persuaded, as were several other well-known figures in the arts community, that he was profoundly remorseful and determined to turn his life around. He became active again in his filming career and I hired him - about ten years ago - to film some classes and concerts for archival purposes. Over the decade or so that Peter filmed, there were large numbers of people, including adults, in the room. You have probably noticed him occasionally at the back of Jordan Hall at YPO concerts. As far as I know, there has not been the slightest incident of any kind, and there have been no complaints.

As I have told you so often, everything we do has consequences. My trusting nature, which you know so well from our rehearsals, classes and tour (we call it "Giving an A"), also has now had very serious consequences.

I felt it was the right thing at the time to give this man a chance. I deeply regret the upset I have brought to you all inadvertently as a result of the way this has all played out.

The New England Conservatory has been affected by, like many educational institutions today, in the serious concerns surrounding the sexual molestation cases reported in the press. This is fully understandable. It is a very good thing that the horrific impact of this travesty of human relationships is at last becoming more fully understood and that educational institutions will no longer tolerate it. The administration and the Board of NEC felt that as soon as they were made aware that Mr. Benjamin had a record, even though there had been no complaints, that they had no choice but to bar him. In addition, they also decided to dismiss me, the person who retained him to do the filming.

Was there no other way for them to handle the situation? I believe there was. If NEC had demanded that Mr. Benjamin be prevented from entering the school again, and if they had announced that forthwith all

adults with any direct contact with young people would be subject to a background check, I am convinced that the press and the community, including all your parents, would have been satisfied that NEC was treating this matter effectively and with extreme seriousness.

Unfortunately for all of us, that is not the path that was followed.

My complete dedication to NEC has been the generating engine of my entire professional life and I was looking forward more than I can express to celebrate my 40 years with the orchestra, 18 months from now. I am deeply upset about not being able to share that with you after all we have been through together: our rehearsals, performances and tour have been the alpha and omega of my life.

Do I wish that NEC had acted more steadily, with a more orderly process, taking into account, not simply my own career, but - much more important - what I believe I might still offer to students? I very much do. But now it is too late and all we can do is reflect on what we have achieved and perhaps, to think more deeply about the way we make decisions; the way we interact with and take care of people and the values that we live by.

Let me add some words of background.....

One week after we returned from our triumphant tour last June, after the sold-out concert in the Musikverein, I was handed a letter from President Woodcock announcing that my tenure as conductor of YPO and my role as the Artistic Director of Walnut Hill would be terminated on June 30th 2012. No reason was given except that they were engaged in succession planning. But I believe that was not the real reason. It is my opinion that the president had become upset with me during the complex discussions caused by disagreements between us about the tour. I believe that terminating my services as soon as possible had become a priority.

During further difficult negotiations it was agreed that my tenure with YPO could be extended for an additional year and my work with Walnut Hill could extend for another two. I had always expected to conduct YPO for many years to come. However, these were terms I tried to accept and live with.

I managed to persuade everyone that it had been my choice to retire and give up YPO, though anyone who knew me would understand that I would not willingly give up my work at my two most beloved institutions.

Even though I was offered the opportunity to resign last week, I decided I would allow myself to be terminated. It was the most painful experience to walk out of my beloved NEC for the last time.

Since I live in possibility and invite you to do so too, we should all think of different ways to spread what we have learned together like ripples. I will develop thoughts as to how I can best continue the work I so much love. And what I will have forever is the memory of all of you.

I believe that only if we treat one another with dignity, can we hope to live fruitful - if sometimes very difficult - lives, enabling us to work together to transform the notes on the page into musical phrases that the great composers have created.

My love to you all.

Ben Zander